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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 KABUL 000186

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STATE FOR SCA/FO (DAS GASTRIGHT), SCA/A, S/CT, EUR/RPM  
STATE PASS TO USAID FOR AID/ANE, AID/DCHA/DG  
NSC FOR AHARRIMAN  
OSD FOR KIMMITT  
CENTCOM FOR CFC-A, CG CJTF-76, POLAD

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TAGS: [MARR](#) [NATO](#) [MOPS](#) [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [AF](#)

SUBJECT: BOUCHER AND WARDAK TALK ABOUT RESOURCES,  
READINESS, THE SPRING OFFENSIVE AND PAKISTAN

REF: STATE 243

Classified By: A/DCM Sara Rosenberry; reasons 1.4(b) and (d).

¶1. (C) Summary: In a January 9 meeting with Defense Minister Wardak, Assistant Secretary for South and Central Asian Affairs Richard Boucher assured Wardak that the United States is working to provide "bigger and better" support to the Afghan National Security Forces. Wardak replied that, in the short-term, such increased support would "send a message to our enemies" regarding the enduring commitment of the United States to Afghanistan. Over the long-term, improvements in Afghan firepower and mobility will allow Afghanistan's international military partners to recede to a supporting role. Wardak explained that, in preparation for an anticipated resurgence of Taliban activity this spring, the Afghan government is increasing the number of security forces in higher risk areas, upgrading Afghan military equipment, accelerating reconstruction, continuing strategic communication activities, and working to keep the enemy off balance during the winter. Boucher explained that the United States will seek to use a number of upcoming high-level international meetings (e.g., NATO Ministerials, G8 fora, upcoming Joint Coordination and Monitoring Board) to highlight a "comprehensive approach" to Afghan reconstruction. While expressing considerable skepticism about Pakistan's motives and behavior, Wardak underlined that Afghanistan is "sincere in our willingness to cooperate with Pakistan -- without compromising our sovereignty." Boucher noted that the Pakistani government now seems to be viewing the Taliban threat differently, realizing that it represents a danger to both Afghanistan and Pakistan. End Summary.

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INVESTING IN THE AFGHAN NATIONAL SECURITY FORCES  
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¶2. (C) Boucher assured Defense Minister Wardak that the United States is working to provide "bigger and better" support to the Afghan National Security Forces. Wardak replied that this increased investment in Afghan capabilities would have important short- and long-term effects. In the short-term, it would "send a message to our enemies" regarding the enduring commitment of the United States to Afghanistan. Wardak assessed that the Taliban and other

insurgents expect that the international community eventually will lose interest in Afghanistan and leave, giving rise again to a situation in the country similar to the chaos of the 1990s. Over the long-term, improvements in Afghan firepower and mobility will save lives and allow Afghanistan's international military partners to recede to a supporting role. While achieving greater Afghan military capabilities will require a significant investment now by the United States and other international partners, it will prove to be "economical" for them in the long-run. Wardak also observed that this approach would help alleviate political problems in some European capitals by allowing them eventually to reduce their troop commitments in Afghanistan.

13. (C) Wardak said that Afghanistan would like to be considered a long-term friend and ally of the United States, one that can contribute in the future to peacekeeping and other operations of mutual interest. This is another reason Afghanistan wants to acquire more modern military equipment, to promote greater inter-operability with U.S. forces. Boucher asked whether the Afghan Army already was seeing benefits from increased U.S. assistance. Wardak said that the "vanguard" of this increased support was appearing in the form of some new M-16A/M-4 rifles, Kevlar helmets, body armor, and soon-to-be-delivered Humvees. He commented that Afghan and U.S. soldiers enjoy "special relations," resulting from their experiences training and fighting together. Wardak commended the U.S. military for serving with "great honor, skill, and gallantry" in Afghanistan. Boucher noted that he has heard many favorable reports regarding the Afghan Army's own contributions in fighting the insurgency. Wardak said that the Afghan Army currently has 37,000 soldiers, and that his goal is to reach 65,000 in March 2008, by training

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2,000 soldiers per month. He added that he believes that the current target ceiling for the Afghan Army (Note: 70,000 soldiers. End Note) is not based on a proper threat analysis, but is "more political in nature." Wardak suggested the final number should be higher.

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PREPARING FOR SPRING OFFENSIVE  
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14. (C) Wardak said that the Afghan government is "working not to be surprised" by the Taliban this spring, "as we were in 2006." To that end, the Afghan government is increasing the number of security forces in higher risk areas, upgrading Afghan military equipment, accelerating reconstruction, continuing strategic communication activities, and working to keep the enemy off balance during the winter. In this context, he mentioned the ongoing combined operation (Operation "Oqab" -- Dari for "Eagle") the Afghan security forces are conducting with NATO's International Security Assistance Force. This operation is aimed at securing Afghanistan's national "ring road" (Highway 1) establishing "Afghan Development Zones" in the South and East for focused reconstruction efforts, and denying the insurgents sanctuary and infiltration opportunities. Wardak said he hopes that these efforts will deprive the insurgents "of the opportunity to repeat their performance of last year." However, he added that the Afghan government also is planning for "worst case" scenarios.

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HIGH-LEVEL MEETINGS  
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15. (C) Boucher explained that the United States will seek to use a number of upcoming high-level international meetings (e.g., NATO Ministerials, G8 fora, upcoming Joint Coordination and Monitoring Board meeting in Berlin) to highlight a "comprehensive approach" to Afghan reconstruction that more effectively integrates security, economic, government, and development efforts. He emphasized the

importance of having Afghan voices helping to drive the process of convincing Allies to lift caveats on their troops in Afghanistan and to increase their contributions to Afghan military training and Afghan reconstruction. Wardak remarked that he regularly encourages European partners to provide more support to the Afghan Army. (Note: It now appears that Minister Wardak will not attend the NATO Foreign Ministers meeting, but Foreign Minister Spanta will. End Note.)

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AFGHANISTAN-PAKISTAN RELATIONS  
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¶6. (C) Asked about the achievements to date of the Tripartite Military Commission (Note: A military-to-military forum between Afghanistan, Pakistan, and the International Security Assistance Force focused on enhancing security through mutual cooperation and confidence building. End Note.), Wardak assessed that it so far "has not delivered much." He suggested that Pakistan was not taking all necessary action with intelligence provided by Afghanistan, asserted that Pakistani troops sometimes allowed insurgents to infiltrate and attack Afghanistan from within sight of Pakistani border posts, and alleged that Pakistan generally is deeply involved in Afghan internal affairs. Wardak said that he emphasizes to his Pakistani contacts that a stable, democratic Afghanistan is in Pakistan's interest. Boucher commented that Pakistani officials tell him the same thing. Wardak underlined that Afghanistan is "sincere in our willingness to cooperate with Pakistan -- without compromising our sovereignty." Boucher said he would take that message to Pakistan, noting that the Pakistani government now seems to be viewing the Taliban threat differently, realizing that it represents a danger to both Afghanistan and Pakistan.

¶7. (U) SCA Senior Advisor Caitlin Hayden cleared this cable.  
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